



FAQ

Q: What is ConnectingALABAMA all about?

A:

ConnectingALABAMA is a state-wide initiative launched by Governor Riley in January 2009 to promote the deployment and adoption of broadband across the entire state of Alabama. The project is directed by Kathy Johnson, serving as director of Governor Riley's Alabama Broadband Initiative (ALBI). CostQuest Associates was selected by the Governor to assist with project management until January 2011.

The initial goal of the ConnectingALABAMA project is two-fold:

- Mapping where current broadband service is available, where it is not, and more importantly, **why** it is not.
- Work with leaders from around the state to develop a vision for a broadband Alabama.

Based on that collective vision and the map of broadband availability, the ConnectingALABAMA team will launch a set of ACTION Teams in June or July to consider local issues, opportunities and needs – and develop region specific broadband deployment and adoption plans to cover all 67 counties.

Q: How long will it take?

A:

The initial phase of the ConnectingALABAMA initiative is a two-year project scheduled to complete in January 2011. In this initial phase of work broadband service maps are being developed to identify where service gaps exist, and regional deployment and broadband adoption strategies are being developed by local community leaders and experts from around the state. It is quite likely that the final deployment and adoption work will continue on beyond 2011 as local Regional Action Teams work to implement the strategies and projects developed during the first two years of the program.

Q: How much will it cost and how is it being paid for?

A:

The investments being made toward the deployment and adoption of broadband Internet service across the state are critical to our state-wide economic development interests and the vitality of life in Alabama. The ConnectingALABAMA initiative is largely funded by state and federal grants designed to support the deployment and adoption of broadband across Alabama and the United States. Under the direction of Governor Riley's Alabama Broadband Initiative (ALBI) a two year contract for \$1.7M was awarded by a formal Request for Proposal (RFP) process, resulting in a state-awarded contract to CostQuest Associates in January 2009.

Q: Will the ConnectingALABAMA project actually provide internet service to me?

A:

No. ConnectingALABAMA is not an Internet service provider. The project team is, however, working with broadband service providers from across the state to identify gaps in service areas. The ConnectingALABAMA team is also working with state-level and regional teams to determine barriers to deployment and adoption. The project's goal is to promote both the availability and usage of high-speed Internet to enhance the quality of life in Alabama. Your broadband service will be provided through a business arrangement between you and an Alabama service provider of your choice – or Internet service provided through your local community, if it is offered as a community utility.

Q: What is broadband?

A:

The terms broadband and high-speed internet access are often used to mean the same thing. The FCC defines broadband service *as data transmission speeds exceeding 768 kilobits per second (Kbps), in at least one direction: downstream (from the Internet to the user's computer) or upstream (from the user's computer to the Internet), which is about 14 times faster than dial-up service.*

While the FCC may provide the technical definition, it may be more easily understood in defining what broadband can provide. Broadband is helpful (if not necessary) to engage in many of the economic and educational and social interactions taking place across the state, country and world today. In its more down to earth application, broadband allows patients living in rural areas without local access to specialty healthcare to see a specialist over the local family physician's computer equipment. It allows farmers access to information on weather conditions, planting seasons and equipment, and allows them a way to share information on their farms to educate citizens on the importance of agriculture.

High-speed Internet connects businesses to the world, students to education, citizens to government services, military families to loved ones serving overseas, libraries to patrons and much more. Broadband makes it easier to launch a business or work from home, obtain a college degree, pay bills, conduct research and complete homework, or simply to exchange e-mails or photos with family and friends or stay connected through social networks like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Q: What technologies are being considered for the delivery of broadband service?

A:

ConnectingALABAMA considers all technologies fair game for the delivery of broadband service across Alabama. The project does not have a bias or preference toward a technology or a provider. As such, traditional wired services (such as DSL) are in the mix as well as cable (TV) based, wireless broadband (e.g., 3G services), and a host of fixed wireless service alternatives and some relatively new opportunities, such as BPL (broadband over powerline) - as long as the service delivers 768 kbps (according to the standard set forth by the FCC) and is within an affordable price range (comparable to other providers in the area).

Q: Who will decide who delivers service to my home?

A:

ConnectingALABAMA's mission is to help identify un-served areas in the state, facilitate the development of broadband demand, encourage the development of value adding content (e.g., eMed, eLearning, etc.) and ultimately attract and assist quality service providers to develop sustainable business models for the provisioning of broadband across the state. In an ideal situation, you will have multiple choices for your broadband service. And ultimately, you and you alone will decide which service provider is best for you. It may be that in some areas of the state, it is not financially feasible for a provider to expand infrastructure into areas where one or two families live per mile. In these cases, the ConnectingALABAMA Regional ACTION Teams will help connect providers and/or customers with grant sources to assist a provider making an infrastructure investment in that community.

Q: Why is it necessary to map where current service exists?

A:

Broadband mapping is an important first step from a couple of perspectives. First and foremost, developing detailed service maps is a great way to organize and conduct a comprehensive inventory of service (by connection speed) across the entire state with a spotlight on where there are un-served or under-served areas. This core information helps to focus policymakers, community leaders, service providers and others on the central issue at hand: where is the existing digital divide and how can we best close that gap? The service maps are also an excellent first step in engaging all providers across the state in a joint effort to identify and solve an issue that is far larger than any one of them.

The ConnectingALABAMA approach takes great care to develop the maps in a way that protects the valuable business information enjoyed by each of the service providers. Also, having the ConnectingALABAMA broadband service maps on a website helps the citizens of Alabama (consumers and businesses) locate and register their service needs with the initiative and again, help ensure the focus on service gaps is maintained.

Q: ...but don't service providers know where the gaps are?

A:

This is a complicated question. In many ways, the most important 'gap' is really a product of what a consumer wants and when they want it. On one level, a service provider certainly knows where they put equipment and what may be the maximum coverage that equipment can address. But they likely don't know much about the areas in which they do not have equipment deployed. If you think about this across dozens of providers, it becomes even harder for any individual ISP to know where service doesn't exist at all.

On a second level, consider that equipment is placed to satisfy an area's estimated demand. What happens from a demand perspective within that area will change over time. So for a wireline provider, there may have been adequate cable pairs to satisfy demand at one point—but if the area has grown, existing facilities may no longer be adequate. For the case of a wireless provider, maybe equipment, such as a repeater, needs to be added to support changes in how roads run, new traffic volumes or trees which grew into an antenna path. Mapping where service is not available, as well as where people who don't have it want it, can help identify where facilities may need to be reinforced to provide adequate coverage.

In conclusion, putting all of these dynamic issues on one map helps providers (and policymakers) evaluate new service opportunities and isolate areas where coverage can be improved.

Q: Is ConnectingALABAMA a part of state or federal government?

A:

ConnectingALABAMA is a statewide project launched by Governor Riley and funded mostly by state and federal grants. The project team is accountable to the Governor's Alabama Broadband Office and Advisory Board, made up of key leaders from across the state.

Q: If I already have broadband in my home / business should I even care about this project?

A:

Broadband connectivity is a proven key to the economic, educational, health and cultural opportunities that exist for all of us. As we all work together to close the broadband gap that currently exists within our state, we will all benefit from a closer / more accessible community. Business development will be made easier. Faith-based, social services and government will be made more efficient. Healthcare options will be improved. Educational opportunities will expand. And, Alabama will recognize economic growth and become an even greater place to call home.

Q: I live in the rural area and don't own a computer; why should I care about this project?

A:

In several ways, this work is all about YOU. Broadband access to the internet is very important to our economic development opportunities...to our employment opportunities...and to the quality of life we have come to appreciate for ourselves and our children. Many areas of the state are at risk of being left behind in this fast-paced world we now all share. The central goal of this project is to help ensure that doesn't happen to you. The ConnectingALABAMA Regional ACTION Teams look forward to working with you and others to explore the personal and business benefits available through high speed access to the internet.

Q: What is an ACTION Team and how does it work?

A:

The Alabama Community Technology Information and Opportunity Network (ACTION) team is in many ways the heartbeat of the ConnectingALABAMA program. The state and regional teams that make up this network of leadership is where it all comes together – where regional broadband deployment plans take shape and get acted on. Your state and regional ACTION Teams will address both sides of the broadband equation: supply and demand. A farmer in rural Alabama needs high-speed Internet in order to market his business to the world. That's demand. An Internet Service Provider expands their broadband infrastructure into a new community. That's supply. The ACTION teams will reach out to all corners and constituencies of the state to consider how best to advance demand, encourage the development of e-applications needed in your part of the state and assist service providers with their work to deliver broadband service where it is most needed and wanted.

Q: How can I join the work of ConnectingALABAMA?

A:

Your participation in this work is important. You can stay tuned to the progress by visiting the program's public web site (www.ConnectingALABAMA.gov) often. One great way to get involved is through your Regional ACTION Team. As these teams get organized, please address your questions and comments to info@ConnectingALABAMA.gov. We look forward to working with you.